

## **STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY**

### **INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE: A VITAL PART OF THE NEW HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

FEBRUARY 26, 2009

The American health care system urgently needs repair and reform. Today as a nation, we spend 16% of our gross domestic product on health care, more per capita than any other country in the world. Yet health outcomes of Americans are ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the world by the World Health Organization. Our system is often called a “sick care” system, not a health care system, because it is designed to treat diseases and illnesses, instead of promoting good health and wellness over the lifespans of our people.

Genuine health reform therefore requires a major transformation in our national mindset on how we care for ourselves and others. It must incorporate and encourage disease prevention activities and lifestyle changes that promote long-term health and well-being. The current incentives in our health care system that lead to over-treatment and mistreatment must be changed to promote high-quality, appropriate, and coordinated health care. The nation’s alarmingly high and growing rates of obesity and chronic disease today are a clear call to action. By preventing diseases before they start and adopting a broader approach to medicine, we will actually reduce costs in the long run, and we will extend and improve the quality of life as we do it.

To achieve this fundamental shift in our nation’s health care mindset, it will be necessary to reform how medicine is practiced. Low-cost or even free health screenings and vaccinations will encourage individuals to take part in preventive medicine. Patient-centered and coordinated care that addresses the whole person – from genetic predispositions, to life-style choices to potentially harmful conditions – is essential for treating acute diseases and managing chronic conditions.

We must also adopt a more integrated approach to medicine, through health care that addresses the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the healing process in order to improve the depth, breadth, and patient choice in clinical practice.

Further, we must incorporate prevention, wellness, and more patient-centered approaches as fundamental components of medical education and the training of health providers. In order to reach the patient effectively, integrative practices must be accepted throughout our health care system, and especially in the education of health care providers and the consumers who will benefit.

Finally, we can look beyond the traditional health care system to the community itself – to local environments, where we can build sidewalks and bike lanes; to workplaces, where wellness programs can help employees include healthy nutrition and exercise in their lives; and to schools, where we can provide preventive screenings and lay a strong foundation for students to lead healthy lifestyles from an early age.

Americans deserve a health care system that provides this kind of high-quality, patient-centered care, and encourages individuals' choices and control over their health. The result, as I have said, of this new focus on prevention and health promotion will be lower health care costs and longer, healthier lives.

I commend Senators Harkin and Mikulski for their continuing leadership on this important issue, and I look forward to working closely with my colleagues on the HELP and Finance Committees and with President Obama to achieve our fundamental goal of improving the quality of health care, expanding access to such care for all our people, and reducing the financial burden of such care.